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## Letters

### Attempt on the Pope's Life: Unpersuasive Case Against Moscow

To the Editor:

In his June 11 column, William Safire misrepresents what Claire Sterling actually reports of the findings of the Martella commission investigating the attempted assassination of the Pope. Safire writes that this commission, by Sterling's report, "has assembled massive evidence that the Bulgarian secret service — obviously under orders of then-K.G.B. chief Yuri Andropov — arranged the attempted assassination. . . ."

If by "massive" Mr. Safire means "convincing," he is correct only in respect to the connection between Agca, designated hitman, and a conspiracy of neo-Nazis and Mafiosi centered in Turkey. He is not at all correct in claiming strong evidence of a connection between the Mafia-Nazi group that supplied Agca and alleged agents of the Bulgarian secret service.

Maybe the Martella commission has information on this point that Sterling was not shown or did not report, but on the evidence of her news article [June 10], the sole source of the claim that this conspiracy traces back to the Soviet Politburo is Agca himself, and the details of this or that figure or place or meeting which Sterling (and Martella?) offer as corroboration of Agca's essential story are nothing but the kind of personal trivia (a facial wart, a limp, the view from

a certain window) to be found in any intelligence file.

This sort of evidence is "massive" only in the sense that there is a lot of it. As to what it proves, the most reasonable assumption would be that the people about whom Agca is supposed to have learned so much through direct contact were under intensive surveillance by a group in a position to put its intelligence at Agca's disposal — e.g., the neo-Nazi Gray Wolves.

This case could easily become, as with the assassination of President Kennedy, a festering sore. If the Martella commission actually says what Miss Sterling implies and Mr. Safire assumes it says about Soviet responsibility, and if the evidence in support of this is as thin as the evidence presented by Miss Sterling and touted by Mr. Safire, then the commission will itself become suspect.

This is not because there are ideopaths but because the idea is so strange that the Soviets should think killing the Pope would do anything other than ignite fires of rage

against them and, having made such a decision, would then seek technical assistance — resourceful though the K.G.B. is otherwise held to be in such "wet" affairs — from their oldest and most passionate adversaries in Eastern Europe.

Why was the Soviet Politburo not worried, for example, that if it let the Gray Wolves in on its plans, they, being the Soviets' historical bitter-end foe, would slip the information to the right people at the right time and get the Soviets into a lot of trouble, and not even pull off the job?

In any case, the one consensual fact about the intelligence game as it has developed in Central Europe since the days of Lenin and Hitler is that multiple cross-penetration of the Reds and the Whites is the rule, not the exception, and that any simple judgment about reality and illusion, such as the judgment of Soviet guilt hinted at by Miss Sterling and joyously leaped at by Mr. Safire, is bound to be in fundamental error.

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Cambridge, Mass., June 11, 1984